



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



# Fisheries Management Plan for North Sea and Channel Sprat

Engagement Report

October 2024

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# Introduction

As part of the preparation and publishing of the draft North Sea and Channel sprat FMP, Cefas acted as the 'Delivery Partner' to prepare the draft FMP for Defra and Scottish Government. Stakeholder engagement for the North Sea and Channel Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) was facilitated by the "Sprat FMP Working Group". This group provided coordination, with support from the Scottish Government, of engagement activities with wider stakeholders to support the delivery of fisheries management proposals and evidence for the sprat FMP.

The Sprat FMP Working Group took a collaborative approach aiming to co-develop the draft FMP in order to build from fishing and marine sectors perspectives and others' expert knowledge for the successful delivery of proposals for the operational management of sprat fisheries in the North Sea and English Channel waters to ensure long-term sustainable harvesting.

Stakeholder events were organised by Cefas to consider evidence, questions, and recommendations arising from Stakeholder events.

Cefas delivered a mix of in-person and online stakeholder engagement events to ensure as many stakeholders as possible had the opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on the draft FMP vision and objectives. Stakeholder engagement was conducted between November 2023 and January 2024, and feedback was collected from policymakers (Defra, Scottish Government), fishers, producers' organisations, academia, environmental groups and NGOs, and ALBs (Arm's-Length Bodies) and NDPBS (Non-Departmental Public Bodies), including Cefas, MMO, Seafish and IFCA's.

## Methodology

Stakeholder engagement for the North Sea and Channel Sprat FMP involved working group meetings, face-to-face and online engagement. Additional online meetings and phone calls to supplement engagement were held.

A dedicated email inbox ([FMP@cefas.gov.uk](mailto:FMP@cefas.gov.uk)), hosted by Cefas, was made available as primary contact for information, and gathering further feedback and evidence emerging during the preparation of the draft FMP.

### Locations

Identification of locations for in-person stakeholder engagement events were based on MMO landings data, indicative of fleet activity and local importance. Input from fishing industry was also considered to identify areas where fishers' interest and engagement was likely to be highest. Stakeholder sessions took place in the following locations and also online:

## Southwest England

- Ivybridge, 27 November 2023, 17.00-19.00

## East of England

- Lowestoft Library, 6 December 2023, 10.00-12.00
- Aldeburgh Beach, 8 December 2023, 10.00-12.00
- Leigh-on-Sea Marina, 12 December 2023, 16.00-18.00 (*Note: no registered interest for face-to-face, but engaged with fishers from the region via phone calls and online meetings*)

## Online sessions via MS Teams

- 7 December 2023, 16.00
- 11 December 2023, 16.00

## Additional engagement

- Fishing into the Future, Fisheries Research Education Programme (Southampton, 7-9 November 2023)
- Cefas Science Conference (London, 14 November 2023)

## Presentations and discussions during stakeholder engagement events included:

- An overview of the legislative framework to the FMP project and development process;
- An overview of the North Sea and Channel sprat FMP development timeline and milestones;
- An overview of available data, existing evidence and current measures used to manage sprat fisheries, and knowledge gaps identified during FMP scoping process;
- An overview of the draft vision and objectives of the FMP as agreed by the Sprat FMP Working Group and actions that need to be taken to achieve the objectives of the FMP; and
- Discussions of the issues facing the sprat fisheries, identification of additional knowledge gaps and opportunities to improve the science and data underpinning sprat fisheries management.

As part of the FMP development process, Cefas, Defra and the Scottish Government also provided regular updates to the wider stakeholder community on FMP progress via existing fora such as the Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs), facilitated by the MMO, in England.

## Stakeholder views and feedback

The stakeholder engagement phase aimed to interact with participants involving the engagement of up to 11 stakeholders at each in-person event and between 2 to 20 participants in on-line sessions.

Six main topics were identified during stakeholder engagement sessions, which formed the basis of the five FMP Goals as outlined in the FMP. These included:

Stakeholder feedback	FMP Goal
The current measures used to manage sprat fisheries are appropriate.	Goal 1
Historically, landings for the stock in the Channel have been high, however in recent years landings have decreased, firstly due to reduced advice in the past, but also due to changes in demand.	Goals 1, 2 and 4
There is uncertainty over stock structure and boundaries of sprat.	Goal 2
Sprat is a key prey species for a number of predators and, as such, further studies are needed to understand the predator-prey relationships.	Goals 3 and 5
Current management does not limit activity in the Channel, but economic factors do.	Goal 1 and 4
Current mesh size for driftnets is a limiting factor in the Southern North Sea area.	Goal 4